



QUESTIONS FOR COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIP PLANNING

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1. What is your school's vision of excellence?

What is it that you want your school known for? There is an old adage: "If you don't know where you are going, you probably won't get there." School leaders, with faculty and staff members, parents, and community partners, should construct a commonly shared vision of excellence for their school before planning community partnerships.

2. What is the goal that this partnership will help to achieve?

Community partnerships should be developed to achieve important school goals. Whether school-, student-, family-, or community-focused, school-community partnerships should be implemented to move a school closer to a vision of excellence. Many schools may be tempted to enter a partnership without clear purpose solely to meet external requirements, expectations, or guidelines. Despite such pressures, school leaders should maintain a measured, purposeful approach to community partnership development. Furthermore, in order to measure the success of a partnership, it is important to have not only a clear goal, but also some measurable indicator(s) of success.

3. What school resources, including time, space, and personnel will the partnership require?

School-community partnerships, whether simple or complex require some effort, from writing and mailing a letter of thanks to training community volunteers. Before entering a partnership, a school should realistically assess its capacity to exert the needed effort. A realistic assessment will help school leaders to decide on the appropriateness of an alliance or perhaps determine needed modifications. Furthermore, school leaders should communicate openly with potential community partners to ensure that they too understand and can commit to the required resource exchange.

4. Is the community partnership project in compliance with school, district, and state guidelines?

No two states, districts, or schools are exactly alike. Some districts have very strict rules regarding school-community partnerships, and the type and value of resources being exchanged. Other districts have few or no restrictions, leaving the final say with school principals. Likewise, some districts encourage individual schools, and some schools encourage individual teachers to engage in community partnerships. Others require that a central authority arrange such partnerships. Before beginning community partnerships, then, schools should take the time to investigate building and district policies to avoid later misunderstandings.

5. Who in the school will be responsible for overseeing partnership planning, implementation, and evaluation?

A team approach helps schools to successfully plan and implement school-wide partnerships without overtaxing one individual. School leadership or site-based management teams, for example, can be organized into committees, one of which could be responsible for working with others in the school and local community to incorporate family and community involvement in school improvement plans and activities. Several variations of this approach are encouraged, and indeed required by the National Network of Partnership Schools.

A team or committee focused on partnerships should assign members to planning, implementation, and evaluation tasks that are required for partnership program development, such as developing and monitoring budgets, maintaining records, and corresponding with partners. The team leader, therefore, must be amenable to distributed or shared leadership. A successful team leader might be an assistant principal, an experienced teacher, or a home-school coordinator with well-honed collaborative skills. It is also important that the team leader is committed to the role and has the time necessary to honor the commitment. Because time is so critical, on many teams, leadership responsibilities are shared in a co-chair arrangement.